

# FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union ♦♦♦ [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk)

October 2010

**JOIN THE LOBBY  
WEDNESDAY  
17 NOVEMBER,  
WESTMINSTER**

**A service to  
be proud of**

**A service worth defending  
See p10, p12**





# Matt Wrack

## No mandate for cuts in our service

This month's magazine gives details of the public opinion survey which we commissioned recently with YouGov. With such a survey we are putting ourselves at the mercy of the public – it is totally up to them how they respond.

But the results show that the public in the UK overwhelmingly back their firefighters. They think that firefighters do a fine job. They are satisfied with the service provided by firefighters. Above all, they do **not** support cuts in our service.

These are remarkable findings when you think about the political context in which these questions have been asked. For the past two years or so we have been drip-fed an endless message that huge cuts are necessary, inevitable and unavoidable. This has been a process of softening up the public for cuts that will inevitably turn out to be hugely unpopular. The aim is to convince people that – however unpopular – the cuts are necessary.

### False argument

This argument is false – for at least two reasons. First, many mainstream, respected and orthodox economists accept that the cuts agenda creates a huge risk of tipping the economy into a double-dip recession. As cuts are made, public sector contracts are cancelled (for school buildings, for instance) and people lose their jobs, so there is less

demand for goods and services. This has the potential to drive the economy further into recession as other firms are able to sell less. They, in turn, cut back on investment, cut more jobs, reduce wages and benefits and a vicious downward cycle begins again. This is exactly what happened under the Thatcher government in the early 1980s.

Second, we need to remember that the cuts agenda of the coalition government is based on political decisions

and choices. The Tories under Cameron are opposed to public services for ideological reasons and not just because of cost. Their political view is that society would be better if services such as health, education and so on were provided by the private sector. They see goods and services provided by the private firms through the market as more efficient (and therefore preferable) than services provided by the public sector. One major problem with this

view is that it leads to increased social division and inequality. Those at the top can afford the best service, the rest have to make do. The end result is shown, for example, in the huge inequalities in health in the USA where 46 million people are not covered by health insurance at all.

### Remarkable

In view of the drive to convince people that public services have to be cut back or scrapped, it is remarkable that so many have rallied to support the fire and rescue service and their firefighters.

This supports a point we made a couple of months ago. It is all very well making the case for cuts in the abstract. If we can save a couple of billion pounds here and there why would we not? But when the reality hits home that the cuts mean hospitals closing, schools not being repaired or fire station cutbacks, people realise that, actually, they do not support the cuts.

Asking people about real cuts to the real fire and rescue service has produced a very clear message. The public support their firefighters – and they do not support further cuts. We need to make sure every single politician involved in the fire service hears this message.

Who will stand up for our service? Who will fight to protect our communities? Who really represents the views of the public over fire service cuts?

We do. The Fire Brigades Union.

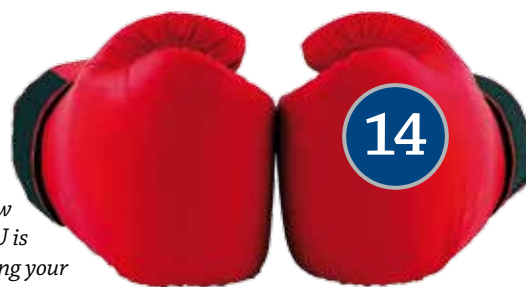


## Asking has produced a clear message. The public support firefighters – and they do not support further cuts

# Contents

## Jobs and safety – the fight is on

How  
the FBU is  
fighting your  
corner on pensions



STEFANO CAGNONI



London firefighters protest against threats to sack them

### Features

#### 10 A matter of life and death

FBU research highlights high level of life-or-death rescues ignored by Westminster government

#### 12 The public says No!

Poll commissioned by FBU shows public set against cuts in fire services

#### 14 Fighting for pensions

How the FBU is battling to protect firefighters' futures

#### 16 People like us

Why Matt Wrack joined a delegation to Colombia

### News

**4** Strike ballot over sack threat; action resumes after bosses reject deal

**5** TUC to coordinate cuts action; minister comes clean on regional controls

**6** Sacked manager vindicated with FBU's help; Audit Commission misses the point; in brief

### Regulars

**5** **Sounding off**  
Government has binned equality and diversity

**7** **News focus**  
Behind the job cuts nightmare

#### 8 Aerial ladder platform

FBU national school: a real education

#### 18 Your health

Investigating serious incidents

#### 19 Legal Beagle

Sick leave and fit notes

#### 20 Day off

Ian Dick cares for abandoned animals

#### 22 Prize quiz

Win *Firefighters and the Blitz*

#### 23 Station Cat

The news they don't want you to hear

#### 24 25-year badges

COVER PICTURE: AFP/GETTY IMAGES

## LETTERS

### Tribute to firefighters

I have written a book, *Warriors in Fire Boots*, published by Jeremy Mills Ltd, as a tribute to the gallantry of UK firefighters.

It opens with the death of James Braidwood, London's first fire chief, at the great fire of Tooley Street in 1861 and continues through fatalities at the Morecambe shell-filling factory in 1917, and Thomas Brown's gallant hook-ladder rescue in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the loss of 19 men at Cheapside Street, rescues at Woolworths Manchester, and the loss of others such as Colin Townsley, Nic Nicolson, Fleur Lombard, Michael Miller and Jeffrey Wornham.

Most of the book deals with the courageous actions of fire-fighters during World War II.

It is my contention that many of the men and women of Britain's wartime fire service were as much in mortal combat, saving lives and extinguishing fires, as were veterans of Normandy, Monte Cassino, or Kohima.

This tribute to the valour of firefighters will be available in bookshops at £14.99 from 18 October.

I am an out-of-trade FBU member who served with Tyne and Wear for 30 years. I was recently invested as an MBE for services to the Sunderland Remembrance Parade, which is now a national focus for firefighters and is believed to be to biggest event of its kind outside London.

**Arthur Lockyear**  
**ArtemusAiki@aol.com**

# News

October 2010



London firefighters demonstrated in central London on 16 September

## Strike ballot over sack threat

### London

Over 5,000 London firefighters will be balloted for strike action after the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) decided to go ahead with plans to tear up their contracts.

In August LFEPA told the Fire Brigades Union it was beginning formal consultation over dismissals. Sackings could begin from 26 November.

The sacking notice is intended to force firefighters to agree new shift patterns, which pave the way for reducing fire cover at night as well as disrupting firefighters' family lives.

Some 2,500 firefighters marched in undress uniform through central London on 16 September to lobby a LFEPA meeting. A wall of noise could be heard inside headquarters as

firefighters expressed their anger.

London executive council member Ian Leahair told the rally: "When we had 300 to 400 out here protesting at their last meeting, they said 'what a small turnout'. Well I say to them: look again."

He added: "Let's make it clear to that Tory bully in there. Are you prepared to strike if you have to?" The resounding reply of "Yes" came back in response.

The strike ballot follows a 95% vote for industrial action short of a strike. Leahair emphasised that firefighters had been forced to consider strike action by a management hell-bent on provoking a dispute, rather than negotiating.

He said that the brigade was working on plans to use new shifts as a means to reduce night-time fire cover, as revealed in *Firefighter* in March this year.

## Action on again as fire chiefs spurn agreement

### Essex

Industrial action has resumed in Essex after fire chiefs backed away from a negotiated agreement.

The dispute, which began with 44 firefighter posts being axed and specialist crewing being downgraded, involved industrial action for eight months last year. A settlement appeared close after the union brokered an agreement in July.

However, an overtime ban and a refusal to cover other staffing shortages resumed on 20 September after the Essex chief reneged on the agreement.

Keith Flynn, Essex FBU secretary, said: "We had a deal to end the dispute and now the fire authority has backed away from it." He added: "Quite frankly, our members are livid. In good faith, throughout the summer fire crews have tried to cover the shortages on the frontline caused by the cuts whilst we have been negotiating a compromise settlement. That good faith has been thrown back in their face."

Michael Nicholas:  
FBU will hold  
minister to  
account

[www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk)

# TUC to coordinate action against cuts

## Union action

The TUC decided last month to coordinate action against government cuts. Delegates voted overwhelmingly to organise "broad solidarity" when the government announces its comprehensive spending review on 20 October.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said that cutting budgets by 25-40% was "lunacy". He added: "This is not just a war on our people, it is a war on the entire population in the interests of big business, bankers and the super rich."

Wrack said a YouGov poll for the FBU showed that 85% of people opposed cuts to fire service budgets and 95% wanted no fewer or more firefighters (see pages 12-13).

The Times published a survey the day after the TUC debate showing that 75% of the public reject the speed and scale of cuts. Studies by the TUC show that the poorest will be hit more than 10 times harder than the richest.



**Matt Wrack: FBU poll shows 95% want more or no fewer firefighters**

Wrack said: "These cuts can be defeated. It will take a momentous struggle and we need unity. We need demonstrations, industrial action and a political alternative. Our challenge is to build a huge movement – with unions at the head – for a better alternative and a decent society."

■ FBU speakers figured in key debates at the TUC. Michael Nicholas spoke on Haiti and Rose Jones on climate change. Tam McFarlane spoke on the anti-union laws and Palestine. Matt Wrack also spoke on pensions and safety.



STEFANO CAGNONI

## SOUNDING OFF

### Equality and diversity – officially downgraded

Michael Nicholas

One of the first acts of the new CLG fire minister Bob Neill has been to disband all the equality and diversity initiatives and responsibilities of central government under the guise of "localisation".

Recruitment targets for black and minority ethnic (BME) and women are **now left in the authority of the very people who opposed the targets in the first place** and who never cared for the aspiration of a diverse workforce.

The minister also announced that the *Equality and diversity annual report* will be scrapped as it was too "time consuming". Therefore, the CLG will no longer monitor how productive the fire service has been on equality issues.

In the last 13 years, the fire service has seen major changes in the way inequality is addressed. Legislation, policy and support from central government have produced a fire service that is far more diverse than it has ever been. The FBU has been at the forefront of the voices championing that change.

Thirteen years ago the fire service in England employed 621 BME firefighters (1.3%) and 434 women (0.9%).

**Harassment and bullying were rife** and many fire services had no clear policies for dealing with inappropriate behaviour. In 2009 we now employ 2.9% BME and 3.6% women. Quite frankly, without that we would have been no further forward and yet we still have some way to go.

The FBU must ensure that we do all we can to avoid a return to the bad old days. The fire minister has taken a dangerous and backward step and we will hold him to account.

**Michael Nicholas is the FBU's B&EMM executive council member**

# Minister: FiReControl does not work, but we won't scrap it

## Control

Technology in the new regional control centres can manage only one town in Yorkshire and one borough in London, according to the minister who decided to continue with the project.

CLG minister Eric Pickles told the House of Commons Communities select committee that: "The only town that the system recognised within the whole of Yorkshire is Wakefield. That in itself is slightly worrying."

"If you consider the only place that the system currently recognises in

London is Southwark, you understand the problems we're up against. A big European company like EADS should not mess us around any more."

Ian Watkins, regional FBU chair for Yorkshire and Humberside, said: "Costs are spiralling, buildings remain empty and IT systems are not up to scratch. This turkey of a project risks becoming an albatross round the coalition's neck unless they scrap it as soon as possible."

North Yorkshire's chief fire officer has already asked staff for "expressions of interest" in voluntary

redundancy.

Watkins said: "The public will ask Questions about why public funds are being used on this wasteful project, while frontline firefighters and experienced control staff face losing their jobs."

He added: "FiReControl flies in the face of both 'localism' and 'value for money', which ministers say underpin their policies."

"The coalition government is prepared to ditch ID cards and the school building programme on the grounds of cost – but it's still funding FiReControl."

# Vindication for sacked manager

## Derbyshire

A station manager sacked for gross misconduct has thanked the FBU for helping him to "get his life back" after an employment tribunal ruled he had been dismissed unfairly.

Before his sacking Simon Nutman had an unblemished 14-year career in three different fire and rescue services and several commendations and awards.

But after a complaint against him by a member of the public, Derbyshire fire and rescue service sacked him despite serious flaws in the disciplinary process. The CFO at the time both heard the appeal and upheld the dismissal.

FBU solicitors Thompsons took up the case in June, securing an employment tribunal hearing at Nottingham that lasted six days. It heard that the complaint against Simon was investigated in an inadequate way and that witnesses were not interviewed.

The tribunal found unanimously that Simon had been unfairly dismissed.

Simon said that the panel found that the investigator and hearing chair presented their evidence in a manner "whereby each was more concerned with supporting each other than with effectively establishing the facts independently and objectively for the purpose of making a



*Simon Nutman: FBU, family and friends supported him throughout*

proper assessment of the case.

"I was suspended from the service and felt ostracised during the ten months of the investigation. My health suffered and it also had a severe impact on my family.

"I was relieved to have proven my unfair treatment and can only thank the FBU, Thompsons, my family and a friend, who stood by me and supported me throughout with untold levels of help, for getting me the recognition of unfair dismissal and my life back."

## Audit Commission misses the point

### Resilience

The Audit Commission's latest report on the fire rescue service in England has missed the point, the Fire Brigades Union says.

*Business continuity management in the fire and rescue service* found that most fire and rescue services have satisfactory plans in place to cover short-term disruptions.

But it said that services cannot cope with every situation indefinitely. If disruptions are "sudden, involve high numbers of staff, last a long time and are widespread," there is a

"higher chance the risk to public safety will increase".

FBU assistant general secretary Andy Dark said: "It is disappointing that the Audit Commission did not make the obvious point that the best way to ensure that fire rescue services can provide emergency cover throughout periods of major disruption is to ensure that the service has enough well-trained firefighters under normal circumstances."

He added: "The fire and rescue service is a key part of the social infrastructure.

"Business continuity" can only be assured by maintaining or improving

investment in the service, not by slashing funding.

"It is very worrying that only one fire and rescue service (Suffolk) identified that disruption to the service from industrial action is best minimised by achieving good industrial relations. It's an important point and one which the Audit Commission manifestly failed to make itself."

*Business continuity management in the fire and rescue service* can be downloaded from the Audit Commission website: [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

## IN BRIEF

### Another reason to scrap regional controls

The government's FiReControl project does not need nine regional control centres (RCCs), fewer will do, according to Robin Southwell of the firm EADS, which is responsible for the technology. He was interviewed by Radio 4's *Face the Facts* programme on 26 August.

FBU executive council member for control Sharon Riley said: "The original business case for nine RCCs placed high emphasis on national resilience. To further reduce this number, without risk assessment or business case on a whim to save money and deliver a cut-down system, is a disgrace."

The FBU is also seriously concerned over plans to outsource controls in Berkshire and the Isle of Wight to Surrey fire and rescue services.

### Pleural plaques

The government has published guidance about who is eligible for payments under the new pleural plaques scheme in England and Wales, and how they should apply.

The FBU's solicitors Thompsons says the closing date for applications is 1 August 2011 and all supporting documents must be submitted within 30 days of the application otherwise it will be rejected.

John McGhee, FBU national officer, said: "If a member was diagnosed with asbestos-related pleural plaques before 17 October 2007 our solicitors will pursue their claim at no cost. If you are one of those, then get in touch with the solicitor dealing with your case."

### Union rights

The FBU is backing a demonstration and lobby of parliament on Wednesday 13 October to support the Lawful Industrial Action Bill that has been drafted in response to court cases stopping action on petty technical grounds against unions whose members had voted overwhelmingly in favour of strike action.

[www.unitedcampaign.org.uk](http://www.unitedcampaign.org.uk)



**NEWS  
FOCUS**  
CUTS

*Fighting back: Rally at TUC headquarters in London against the threat to sack the capital's firefighters*

# 10,000 job cuts nightmare

National officer Dave Green explains the threat to jobs

## Public spending

The government's comprehensive spending review to be announced on 20 October will set out in detail public spending for the next financial year (April 2011 to March 2012) and for the years ahead – including the fire and rescue service.

In his June budget chancellor George Osborne said that, with the exception of health and international development, departments faced average cuts of 25%. In July, Lib Dem chief secretary to the Treasury Danny Alexander ordered ministers to plan for cuts of 40%.

What would cuts on this scale mean for the fire and rescue service?

Just over 65,000 people are employed by the fire and rescue service – 55,000 of them as wholtime, retained or control firefighters.

Between a half and two-thirds of fire service income comes from central government. The level is dependent on the type of authority that administers fire provision – metropolitan, county council or combined fire authority. Local government provides the rest of the funds from council tax – frozen for at least a year – and central government grants – all being cut.

Over four-fifths of fire service expenditure goes on employees' salaries. Although the cuts will vary across different brigades, the UK fire and rescue service may face total job cuts of between 6,000 and 11,000

**DEFEND OUR  
FIRE AND RESCUE  
SERVICE**  
National rally  
and lobby

**Central Hall, Westminster**  
**Wednesday 17 November**  
**FBU members will tell MPs**  
**that our service needs**  
**investment not cuts.**

over the next four years.

Cuts on this scale are complete lunacy and would dramatically undermine the efficiency, safety and effectiveness of the fire and rescue service.

That is why the Fire Brigades Union is lobbying parliament on 17 November to demand that MPs listen to our professional concerns.

The planned cuts would come on top of the absolute fall in the number of frontline firefighters in recent years. Although under

New Labour total fire service personnel rose between 1997 and 2010, since 1997 the UK fire and rescue service has lost 3,381 wholtime firefighters (a 9% decrease). There are now 1,030 fewer frontline (wholtime, retained and control) firefighters (a 2% decrease) compared with 1997.

Many essential tasks, such as community fire safety and fire training, are performed by "other" personnel. Some are former or current uniformed personnel. Yet others, though, will carry out human resources or similar headquarters functions. What stands

out from the figures is the increase in the numbers of "other roles". Since 1997 an additional 3,616 personnel have been recruited for these roles (a 58% increase).

Two conclusions follow.

First, firefighters have hugely increased their productivity – doing more with less. Firefighting is already a lean, efficient service. Second, cuts now would not be "trimming the fat" – but gnawing on the bones, right down to the marrow.



## NUMBERS OF UK FIREFIGHTERS (total, full-time equivalent)

	Wholtime	RDS	Control	Other	Frontline (total cols 1-3)	Total UK
<b>31 March 1997</b>	39,169	15,370	1,783	6,272	56,322	62,594
<b>31 March 2010</b>	35,788	17,534	1,970	9,887	55,292	65,179

Source: CIPFA Fire and rescue service statistics



**VIEW**  
FROM THE  
AERIAL LADDER  
PLATFORM

## **Sean Starbuck** **National** **school – a** **real education**

**T**he 2010 FBU national school has been designed by the FBU head office education department to help FBU officials discuss a range of contemporary and relevant issues.

Topics will include the development of trade union strategies to deal with modernisation of the fire service and the

relevance of both public and private sector trade unionism today.

The course will therefore provide opportunities for you to update your knowledge and develop your skills and confidence to engage in debates covering current fire service employment issues; what is happening at the National Joint

Council; and matters with a wider social and political relevance, especially in support of fairness and equality in the workplace and community.

It will help you to:

- understand the importance of trade union activities at local, national and international levels and the ways in which



these can interlink

- discuss key current issues for the FBU within the UK fire service, of concern to the National Joint Council and to identify priorities for the union and its members
- consider wider issues of concern to trade unionists, including fairness and equality

- consider how the union might develop strategies for building effective organisation at all levels and build unity in the workplace to protect the interests of members
- think about the relevance of political ideas in pursuit of trade union objectives
- understand the broader trade union and labour movement, both national and

international, and factors affecting its development both now and in the past.

Don't miss this opportunity to attend.

Speak with one of your brigade/sectional officials and get an application form today.

**Sean Starbuck is a national officer of the Fire Brigades Union**



# A matter of life

## Firefighter reveals new rescue figures that prove the value of emergency intervention

**F**irefighters are carrying out record-breaking numbers of rescues from fires, proving that emergency intervention remains at the heart of the fire and rescue service. New research for the Fire Brigades Union reveals how high levels of life-or-death rescues at fires – long ignored by the Westminster government – prove the value of firefighting to society and illustrate the foolishness of cuts to frontline services.

As FBU general secretary Matt Wrack has put it: “There are people who might be dead today, but are alive because of the intervention of firefighters. There are people who might have far more serious injuries, but for the rapid response of firefighters.

“We cannot allow the government and local fire authorities to cut the fire and rescue service. The public recognises that we are a life-or-death service, where our intervention makes the difference between

those who survive and those who don’t. We’ve already faced cuts under the last government and there is simply no bloat on the frontline. We have massive public support – we need to campaign now to defend our service and the firefighters that make it work.”

### A rescue service

Emergency intervention remains at the heart of firefighting. Research for the Fire Brigades Union reveals that firefighters carry out high levels of rescue from fires. The data, obtained from individual fire and rescue services by the Labour Research Department (LRD), indicates that over 7,000 people (7,098) were rescued from fires in the UK between April 2009 and March 2010.

Overall, these rescues from fires equate to 592 rescues a month, or 137 a week, or 19 rescues a day. Of those rescued, some

4,578 were classified as injured, while the remainder were unharmed. The regional variation is also significant. Over 1,000 rescues were effected in Scotland and nearly 500 in Northern Ireland.

These figures are the first results of the electronic incident reporting system which is now in operation in all fire and rescue services. Although there are some issues of concern with the statistics – some brigades had very low figures or did not separate those injured from those rescued unharmed – they are the first reliable UK-wide figures on rescues for over a decade. That is because CLG did not publish rescue figures systematically during the noughties. The last set of published total figures, in *Fire Statistics UK 1999*, recorded 5,099 rescues for the UK, and 3,816 in England.

The increased number of rescues is all the more remarkable when set against the



*The high level of rescues is a key indicator of the continued value of firefighting to communities*

*LEFT: Firefighters search for survivors of the Stockline factory explosion in Glasgow in 2004 that killed nine people*

*RIGHT: A tower block fire in Kingston, Surrey earlier this year*

# and death

fall in the number of fires and fire deaths over that period. The number of fires rose from 139,300 in 1981 to a peak of 228,300 in 2001, before failing to 144,500 in 2007. Casualties at all fires fell from 1,096 in 1979 to 443 in 2007. Although these improvements reflect many social, economic and technical factors, they also indicate the successful fire prevention work carried out by firefighters.

And, of course, rescues from fires do not include other notable achievements in recent years. During the floods in 2007, firefighters rescued over 3,000 people from their homes and workplaces, protecting critical national infrastructure in the process. It is no wonder that the public puts firefighters at the top of the list of best responders after this intervention. Nor should we forget the role played in major incidents such as the 7/7 terrorist attacks, when 700 people were rescued, or the Buncefield explosion, when more than 1,000 firefighters attended the blaze from 33 fire and rescue services across the country.

The high level of rescues is a key indicator of the continued value of firefighting to communities – something the

**Rescues from all fires 2009-10**

<b>Total rescues</b>	
UK . . . . .	7,098
England . . . . .	5,196

<b>FBU regions: total rescues</b>	
1 Scotland . . . . .	1,137
2 Northern Ireland . . . . .	481
3 North East . . . . .	373
4 Yorkshire . . . . .	366
5 North West . . . . .	1,495
6 East Midlands . . . . .	260
7 West Midlands . . . . .	387
8 Wales . . . . .	284
9 Eastern . . . . .	621
10 London . . . . .	679
11 South East . . . . .	183
12 Southern . . . . .	332
13 South West . . . . .	500

public understands and supports. The high level of rescues also shows that to cut the fire and rescue service would be to pass a death sentence on people who would otherwise have lived or avoided serious injury.

Firefighting is a matter of life and death for the communities we serve. That is why we cannot accept the cuts to the service expected in the comprehensive spending review. That is why we have to oppose government plans for kamikaze cuts.



*Firefighters rescue a victim of the Stockline explosion*

FR PIX

CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES

# Public say 'no to fire cuts'

**A new opinion  
poll shows  
massive support  
for firefighters**

**T**he public believes firefighters are doing a quality job and do not want to see cuts in funding for the fire and rescue service.

These are two of the findings from an authoritative survey for the Fire Brigades Union carried out by the respected YouGov polling organisation.

The results show that the government has absolutely no mandate for imposing cuts on the fire and rescue service.

The public has seen through the rhetoric on the budget deficit and, when asked directly whether our frontline service should be cut, people overwhelmingly rejected the government's plans.

More than nine out of ten (93%) people across the UK believe the fire and rescue service is providing a good service, with only 1% describing it as "fairly bad".

Two out of three (68%) thought the service was very good – a glowing tribute to the work firefighters do on a daily basis. Four out of five (82%) members of the public were satisfied with their local fire and rescue service, while only 2% were dissatisfied.

The public was very clearly opposed to cutting the number of firefighters and to funding cuts for the service.

A whopping 95% said they favoured maintaining the current level of staffing across the UK, with a third (32%) demanding more firefighters. Some 85% said they opposed plans to cut funding for the fire and rescue service as a whole, with the same percentage opposed to local cuts in funding.

Just over one in ten of the population said they wanted cuts – a tiny minority

**95%**  
***95% believe the number of  
frontline firefighters should  
stay the same or increase***

# 85%

## 85% of the public oppose government plans to cut funding for the fire and rescue service

by any standards. Nine out of ten (90%) people believe that the fire and rescue service is good value for money.

One thing is clear. If the public were voting for the “firefighters’ party” there would be no cuts and no need for a coalition.

People see the value of a nationally integrated service, not one where localism is an excuse for ducking responsibility and passing the buck to ordinary people and their communities to bear the brunt of the cuts.

Two-thirds (67%) of the population oppose plans to create regional control centres, accepting the FBU’s arguments that this would lose local knowledge and increase response times.

An overwhelming majority of people (95%) believe that rapid response to an emergency call is a priority for them and householders and for local businesses. The same percentage believe that attendance times should be a high priority for fire and rescue services – exploding the myth emanating from some quarters that response times do not matter.

These findings show that firefighters have a strong public mandate to oppose the cuts.

Firefighters have a huge well of public sympathy to draw on. This is born of the work we do – which the public knows is done for their benefit and at considerable personal risk to firefighters.

Firefighters need to go out and garner public support for our campaigns – turning the strong feeling of solidarity the public feel towards us into active, visible support.

The cuts are not inevitable. They can be fought.

### YouGov survey results

#### To what extent do you think the fire and rescue service is providing a good or a bad service?

Very good . . . . . 68  
Fairly good . . . . . 25  
Fairly bad . . . . . 1  
Very bad . . . . . 0  
Don’t know . . . . . 6

#### How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local fire and rescue service?

Very good . . . . . 60  
Fairly good . . . . . 22  
Fairly bad . . . . . 1  
Very bad . . . . . 1  
Don’t know . . . . . 16

#### To what extent do you support or oppose plans to cut funding in the fire and rescue services?

Strongly oppose . . . 52  
Tend to oppose . . . 33  
Tend to support . . . 9  
Strongly support . . . 2  
Don’t know . . . . . 5

#### To what extent do you support or oppose plans to reduce funding in each of the fire and rescue services?

Strongly oppose . . . 54

Tend to oppose . . . 31  
Tend to support . . . 10  
Strongly support . . . 2  
Don’t know . . . . . 3

#### Do you think there should now be more, fewer or the same number of frontline firefighters?

More . . . . . 32  
Same . . . . . 63  
Fewer . . . . . 5

#### Do you agree or disagree that a rapid response to fires should be a high priority for local people and local businesses?

Strongly agree . . . 70  
Tend to agree . . . 25  
Tend to disagree . . . 1  
Strongly disagree . . . 0  
Don’t know . . . . . 3

#### Do you agree or disagree that the fire and rescue service is good value for your money?

Strongly agree . . . 53  
Tend to agree . . . 37  
Tend to disagree . . . 3  
Strongly disagree . . . 1  
Don’t know . . . . . 6

#### Do you agree or disagree that a rapid response to fires should be a high priority for the fire and rescue service?

Strongly agree . . . 72  
Tend to agree . . . 23  
Tend to disagree . . . 2  
Strongly disagree . . . 0  
Don’t know . . . . . 2

#### Do you oppose or support plans to close three-quarters of local fire control rooms and replace them with nine regional control centres?

Strongly oppose . . . 35  
Tend to oppose . . . 32  
Tend to support . . . 17  
Strongly support . . . 3  
Don’t know . . . . . 14

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov plc. Total sample size was 1,020 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken 16-27 August 2010. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

**M**embers will be aware that the Con-Dem government has public sector pensions in its sights. The media machine is only too happy to promote the myth that costs are spiralling out of control and pensions are “unaffordable”. We face attacks on a range of fronts – all threaten our pensions. We need to understand the attacks in order to combat them.

#### The Hutton review

Former Labour cabinet minister John Hutton is heading a commission on public sector pensions. His interim report was due out as *Firefighter* went to press. The full proposals are expected with the 2011 budget.

The FBU submitted a detailed report to Hutton highlighting the recent substantive changes in the Firefighters’ Pension Scheme (FPS), including the introduction of the New Firefighters’ Pension Scheme (NFPS) in 2006 and the new-look Local Government Pension Scheme.

The response highlighted that these changes were introduced to ensure that the schemes remained “affordable, sustainable and fair” and stressed that there is no evidence yet to show how these existing changes will impact on

future costs. To make further proposals without scrutinising these savings would be unreasonable.

Anyone reviewing the firefighters’ pension schemes must recognise that the role of a firefighter is still inherently dangerous. Any changes must take this into account.

The FBU has warned that raising the retirement age would create an ageing service. There is no evidence of firefighters being able to work until they are 60 years old in the numbers that would be required, and redeployment opportunities are very scarce, if available at all. The full response can be viewed on the FBU website.

#### Options for the future

The Firefighters’ Pension Committee has been invited to discuss possible options for the future, designed to ensure that the schemes remain affordable, sustainable and fair. (See June *Firefighter*.) These options include introducing “cap and share”, increasing contributions, tiered contributions, raising retirement age, introducing flexible retirement options, fixed commutation factors, issues for dealing with future pensionable pay and ultimately closing the Firefighters’ Pension Scheme and transferring

individuals into the New Firefighters’ Pension Scheme.

The FBU argues that it is a foolish strategy to discuss these “options” unless all the evidence to support any proposed savings is available. The FBU has formally written again to CLG to ask for the figures to be made available.

#### Pension sneak tax

The FBU has responded to a government proposal to change tax relief on pension contributions. These changes, if implemented, would affect a large number of FBU members and could have significant tax implications for members contributing towards pensions schemes (see box). They could affect you if you:

- get a pay rise
- get promoted
- have to retire on ill health
- simply accrue more pensionable service.

The FBU has also produced a briefing to explain the proposal and how it could affect you and what you can do to stop it happening. The response and briefing can be found on the FBU website along with a simple way of emailing your MP to encourage them to oppose this sneak tax proposal.

# Fighting the pensions corner

**FBU national officer Sean Starbuck explains the union’s strategies for defending members’ pensions**



# “We face attacks on a range of fronts – all threaten our pensions”

## What the tax changes would mean

- Greg, an FPS member with 25 years' service, receives a promotion worth just under £3,000 and is faced with a tax bill of over £8,000.
- Qamar, an area manager, with 20 years' service, would face a tax charge of £1,336 by simply accruing a further year in the FPS.
- David, an LGPS member facing a redundancy situation, will have a tax liability of £23,600.
- Colin, an FPS member with 20 years' service, transferring to London receiving the London weighting allowance but getting no pay rise, incurs a tax bill of £6,544.
- Gregory, an FPS member with 25 years' service retiring on ill health, could get a tax charge of £12,888 (lower tier) or £30,178 (upper tier).

**! It is vital that members contact their MP and explain that this attack on members' pensions is unacceptable.**

## RDS pension

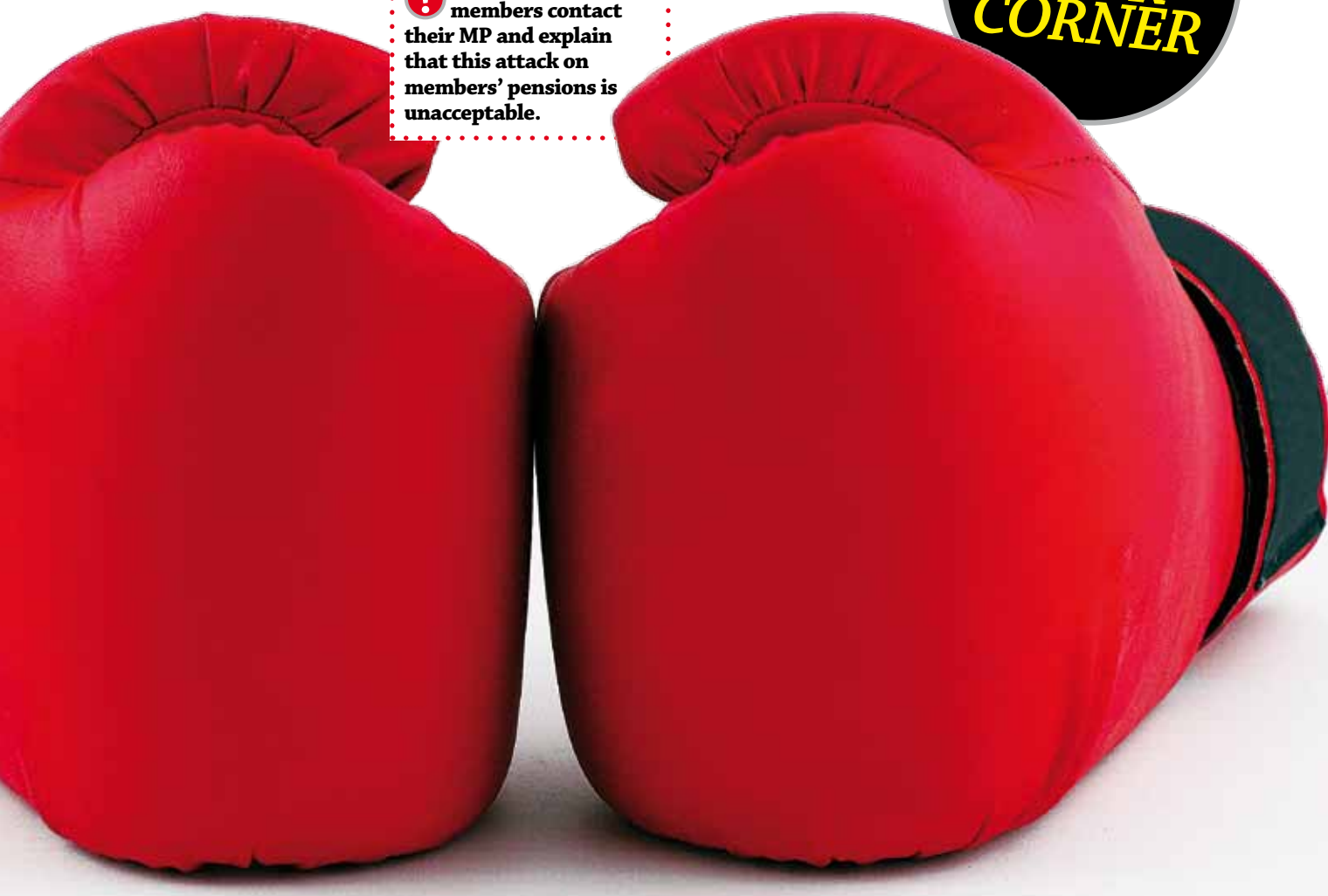
After the FBU's hard-fought legal campaign for RDS eligibility to a pension scheme, a remedy is in sight. This is that RDS firefighters are allowed access to a “modified” scheme that resembles the structure of the NFPS but has the benefits of the FPS. The FBU legal team is in discussion with CLG and the Treasury to agree a blueprint for how this modified scheme will look and to iron out any anomalies that remain. This will then require legislative approval and a period of consultation. Although there is no firm date, progress is expected over the next few months.

## Fairer commutation campaign

My office has received several phone calls regarding the FBU's fairer commutation campaign, which has now progressed to the Pension Ombudsman. The latest position is that the Pension Ombudsman has selected a test case from years 2001–2006 and his decision on this will impact on all those who retired in this period. There is no need to submit anything to the Pension Ombudsman at this stage. If this changes you will be informed.

**More information on pensions on the FBU website [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk)**

**FBU  
FIGHTS  
YOUR  
CORNER**



# Colombia



*“circumstances  
can hardly*

## FBU general secretary Matt Wrack explains why he went on a Justice for Colombia delegation to Colombia in July

**I**n the UK fire service we have to organise campaigns against cuts and attacks on our conditions of service. This is one of the key challenges facing our union at this time. Nobody underestimates the scale of these battles.

But imagine if, on top of trying to organise campaigns on work issues, you also faced the very real possibility of being dragged off into the night, shot in the head and dumped in an unmarked grave – just for daring to organise a union.

That is the terrifying reality for trade

unionists in Colombia. Over the past five years, 284 trade unionists have been killed. In recent years the Colombian government claims that things have improved, but already this year 38 trade union activists have been murdered.

I visited Colombia recently as part of an international delegation including trades unionists. It was deeply shocking to hear the stories of some of those who had experienced the terror of having a family member or a colleague killed in this way.

Some members might ask: “What has

this got to do with us?” Two years ago, two Colombian firefighters attended the FBU conference to speak to us about their work as firefighters in Bogota and about trying to organise a union where it is so dangerous to do so. These are people doing the same job as us but in horrifically difficult circumstances.

Firefighters, like other working people, have bonds beyond individual countries. We all shared in the grief of New York’s firefighters after the horror of the 9/11 attacks. Many firefighters in the UK sent messages, visited and raised money



*Graves marked  
with the year of  
victims' deaths*

to express that solidarity. In the same way we support people in other parts of the world facing challenges we can hardly imagine.

Our delegation met politicians, human rights activists and a number of individuals who had suffered as a result of the violence. Colombian trades unionists told how they experienced violence regularly and how they had seen hundreds of colleagues killed. Workers who dare to take strike action frequently see their local leaders threatened or killed by paramilitary groups.

In five days we heard an enormous amount that shocked us, but I will just mention two things which stand out to me. We met with a group of women from Soacha, a suburb outside Bogota. They told us their sons had disappeared only to be discovered a couple of days later – shot and accused of being

anti-government guerrillas killed in action. The facts of the cases show very clearly that this was simply not possible. They had rather become the victims of a scandal – a series of killings known as “false positives” – civilians who have been falsely identified as “guerrillas” and killed as a result. This arises because government policy is to reward



*Matt Wrack and other members of the delegation in Colombia with Dr Miguel Angel Beltran Villegas (centre) in the high security prison*

financially army units for the numbers of “guerrillas” killed: the more bodies delivered, the bigger the bonuses.

We also visited the site of a recently discovered mass grave where an unconfirmed number of “false positive” bodies had been found. There are similar mass graves in many parts of Colombia.

The women of Soacha have fought to get their cases investigated by the police and judicial authorities, but have faced obstacles at every stage.

They have been threatened and in one case, another son was shot and killed for assisting his mother in investigating the death of his brother.

Remarkably, despite the enormous odds, despite their lack of money and resources, this group of women continued to campaign for justice for those killed.

We attended the high security men’s prison in Bogota, where we were able to meet Dr Miguel Angel Beltran Villegas. Beltran has been imprisoned as a result of academic articles he has written about the political situation and the violence in Colombia.

Because of his criticism of the government he has been accused of involvement with the FARC guerrillas. He has been tortured and has now been in prison since May 2009 despite the fact that he has not been convicted of any crime.

To meet Beltran, the mothers from Soacha and the numerous trade unionists was distressing. It is difficult to imagine trying to function in such circumstances. It is almost impossible to imagine the impact of experiencing the assassination of a member of your family for something we consider a basic right – belonging to a trade union.

Working people and trade unionists in Colombia are people just like us. People trying to make a living and look after their families, trying to organise as workers into trade unions – and facing a terrible threat as a result.



*Members of the delegation in Colombia with trade union activists*

# Your health

## Investigating serious incidents



John McGhee, national officer for health, safety and welfare, explains why the FBU has introduced a new procedure for investigating serious accidents

Following tragic events at operational incidents which led to the deaths and serious injury of firefighters, the Fire Brigades Union realised that a robust accident investigation process was needed as part of the union's system to assist safety representatives following these events.

FBU conference 2008 agreed to work with "all interested parties to create a protocol for fatal/serious accident investigations".

It was also resolved to create a team that could be "called upon to implement the agreed Fire Brigades Union process for fatal/serious accident investigations to support those local officials".

That is why the FBU has published *Serious Accident Investigation: Guidance for Safety Representatives and Officials dealing with the aftermath of Serious Safety Events*.

This guidance outlines the process and provides guidance for all officials involved after fatal/serious safety events.

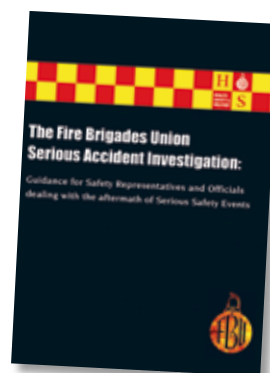
### What is a serious accident investigation?

A serious accident investigation (SAI) is defined as "a systematic process which promotes a logical, consistent and professional approach to the investigation of safety events following systems failures that have resulted in or had the potential to cause death, serious injury or major equipment failure, while providing an impartial and independent evaluation of the events which lead to the failure".

The SAI process is to be used to investigate events that have placed or have the potential to place FBU members at significant risk.

These may involve failures that have an impact on working practices across the fire and rescue service, with the potential to place members at continued or further risk.

Safety representatives will investigate serious incidents using rights that derive from



the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, and the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977.

Safety event investigation within the FBU should be categorised within one of two levels:

- Serious accident investigation (SAI)
- Local accident investigation (LAI)

A safety event may be upgraded from an LAI to an SAI, or downgraded, at any stage following the examination of evidence. The implications of a safety

event may not be immediately clear, but correct post-event management will ensure that the correct response is made.

### FBU investigators

FBU regional health and safety coordinators, under the guidance of the national officer with responsibility for health and safety, will form the union's national team to take on the role of implementing the agreed process and supporting brigade safety representatives conducting serious accident investigations.

FBU regional health and safety coordinators will be available to support local teams investigating safety events that may have national implications and carry out investigation reviews as necessary.

The introduction of the serious accident investigation process will help the union to develop a system of work that will enable the ongoing development of operational and training strategies at local, regional and national level.

This guidance builds on the basic principles of local accident investigation, further defining the role of a SAI, and gives more detail on the systems that are to be used to manage the union's response to all levels of safety event investigations.

It is based on guidance given in the Health and Safety Executive's HSG 65 (*Successful health and safety management* as amended 2000) and HSG 245 (*Investigating accident and incidents* 2004) to ensure that it is a transparent and open process that can be audited at any time.



DUNCAN PHILLIPS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

# Legal Beagle

## Sick leave and “fit notes”

### Sick on holiday

**Q** I recently returned from a week's holiday in Spain but was ill with a stomach bug for the whole week. My employer has refused to accept this as sick leave and says I must take the time as paid or unpaid leave. Is that right?

**A** The European Court of Justice has ruled (in the case of *Pereda v Madrid Movilidad SA*) that a worker who falls sick during a period of scheduled leave has the right to take the lost leave at a different time.

It is not an automatic right. The employee must request that the holiday be treated as sick leave and it helps if they propose dates when the leave could be taken within the same leave year.

If the holiday was at the end of the annual leave year, then case law has established that a worker prevented from taking the leave due to illness must be given the right to take it even if it starts or ends in the following leave year.

The working time regulations specify that an employee must give notice of twice as long as the leave to be taken. So for a week's leave, two

weeks' notice should be given.

You may have a claim before the employment tribunal for a breach of the working time regulations if your employer continues to refuse to allow you to take the lost leave at another time.

Contact your FBU rep for advice as soon as possible as the deadline for lodging a claim is three months less one day from the first day of the leave you propose to take.

**some work then either I come back full time or my sick pay will be stopped.**

**A** Under the new “fit note” system, where an employee is signed fit for work with recommendations and the employer does not apply those recommendations, then the fit note reverts back to a sick note. You are therefore entitled to treat the fit note as a sick note and, provided that you have notified your employer according to your contractual requirement in order to qualify for sick pay, you are entitled to be paid in the same way that you were when you were signed as “not fit for work”.

Speak to your FBU rep about lodging a grievance that you have been subject to an unlawful deduction of wages. The deadline for a claim for unlawful deduction from wages is three months less one day from the date the deduction was made.



### Fit notes

**Q** My GP has been signing me as “not fit for work” for several months. She has now signed me as fit for some work and recommended reduced duties. But my employer says that if I am fit for



# “We’ve had hedgehogs, mice ... even frogs”

## Ian and Nikki Dick rescue and care for abandoned animals

### Animal rescue

It’s Pet Rescue with a twist. Northumberland fire-fighter Ian Dick and his wife Nikki always mean to find new homes for the strays and abandoned animals they’ve been nursing back to health for the last two decades. But, sometimes, they find they just can’t part with them.

Which helps explain why the couple, who have bred labradors, now share their home and garden with five dogs, ten cats plus assorted guinea pigs, rabbits and gerbils. There’s even a 20-foot “run” in the back garden so the smaller furry animals get a good run-around outside the confines of hutch or cage.

Ian and Nikki are well known locally for their willingness to take in stray or abandoned animals in need of nurturing and give them a temporary home. “We’ve got our own pets – and we’ve bred labradors. Word’s got round and people don’t just bring round cats and dogs”, says Ian, a green watch firefighter at West Hartford station near Blyth. “We’ve had hedgehogs, mice – all kinds of creatures. We’ve even had frogs.”

The motivation is simple. “We hate to see animals suffer. Sadly, a lot of pets seem to get abandoned, after Christmas or when kids lose interest. I suppose we’re a bit of a soft touch, but we don’t really mind – it’s a good life. We’ve been doing it for years,” says Ian, FBU health and safety rep for the brigade.

It started out with cats. Nikki was an animal nurse attached to a vet in Newcastle before training as a psychiatric nurse. But her love of cats goes back to

childhood. Her father worked in pest control and was sometimes called out to farms. He was meant to get rid of all vermin – which included cats, according to some farmers. He couldn’t bear to kill them so he brought them home for Nikki ...

Ian’s father had a fondness for even smaller creatures. “They called him the bumblebee rescuer, because he would rescue exhausted honey bees, reviving them with a taste of sugar paste from a spoon.”

With dads like that, it seems almost predestined that the couple would carry on caring for all creatures great and small in later life. Ian recently revived a bee which attached itself to his sock at the fire station by the same method his father used. And he once nursed an injured pigeon, Walter, back to health after rescuing it from underneath a fire engine before it fell into the diesel tanks. “My colleagues think I’m a bit touched,” says Ian, who has also even been known to rescue spiders and beetles from the appliance floor.

### Permanent residence

The couple have a good network of contacts, including local voluntary groups, and have been known to surf on Pets Reunited in the hope of reconciling owners with their lost pets. “It’s always good to find pets who’ve been abandoned or mistreated a good home where they’ll be well cared for,” says Ian.

But some still take up permanent residence. There’s Wilf the deaf albino cat, who the couple hope will be around as long as Ronan the young rabbit who arrived emaciated when less than two years old. His owners had moved house – leaving him to fend for himself in a filthy hutch with no food. Nikki was alerted to his plight, and he soon thrived and settled. He died of old age after many years living in the Dicks’ garden with his companion Hazel.

And there are certainly no plans to part with Wendy, a labrador/springer cross, who arrived in a terrible state less than a year ago. She was skin, bone and bald patches and “terrified of strangers” at first. She’s now very much at home and looks like staying. The couple even hang onto some of the labrador puppies they’ve bred – step forward Big Dave and Beverley, siblings bred from Tracey and a stud dog from nearby kennels. Colin, the resident mature male labrador, has trouble



Ian and Nikki Dick at home





MARK PINDER

## IAN DICK

*Ian Dick is a wholetime green watch firefighter at West Hartford station near Blyth in Northumberland. He also works as a retained firefighter and is FBU health and safety rep for his brigade. In what spare time remains, he and his wife Nikki play host to dozens of rescued animals.*

with his hips so wasn't up for breeding.

Beverley and Dave still meet up with the rest of the litter. Their eight siblings went to good owners in the North East who are happy to keep in touch – so much so that the whole litter, plus owners, get together once a year for a day out on one of Northumberland's secluded beaches. Positive vetting seems to have paid off. Cats currently in residence include Kevin the feral who strayed in one day and made himself at home, and Mitch, Vinnie and Elsie, mousers rescued from a car park in Gateshead.

### Food costs a fortune

Food for all the animals "costs a fortune" – and pet insurance doesn't come cheap. Ian now works as a retained firefighter at his local station, as well as whole time at West Hartford, to help bankroll it all.

Keeping cats, dogs and small furry animals has not turned out to be a recipe for animal mayhem. They all seem to rub along. Bob the kitten once spent the night with guinea pigs, who emerged unscathed next morning.

But blood – and worse – was spilt recently, although it didn't happen at Dick's. Nikki bathed and primped all five dogs in readiness for a photo shoot in a white-walled studio in a barn conversion near Morpeth. It was a rainy day and the dogs got muddy on the way. The photographer dangled a sausage in front of Big Dave to get a shot of him looking up. But Big Dave bit his tongue, got excited and Wendy had an accident on the white carpet. Soon the white walls were spattered with blood and mud and worse as he charged around. The others soon joined in.

"They managed to mess the whole place up, which was a shame and not like them at all," says Ian. "But we got some good pictures". Fortunately, it's not like that at home.

# Prize Quiz



PA PHOTOS

## Win Firefighters and the Blitz

To win a copy of *Firefighters and the Blitz* please send your answers to the prize quiz by 31 October 2010 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (October 2010), FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames KT2 7AE. Please include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

### The Blitz

**1** What association does the London Tube have with the Blitz?

- A Food transportation
- B Munitions transportation
- C Shelter for Londoners
- D Escape networks

**2** During WW2, Bletchley Park was known for?

- A Fighter pilot training
- B Building planes
- C Code breaking
- D Training spies

**3** The German air offensive known as the Blitz started in September of which year?

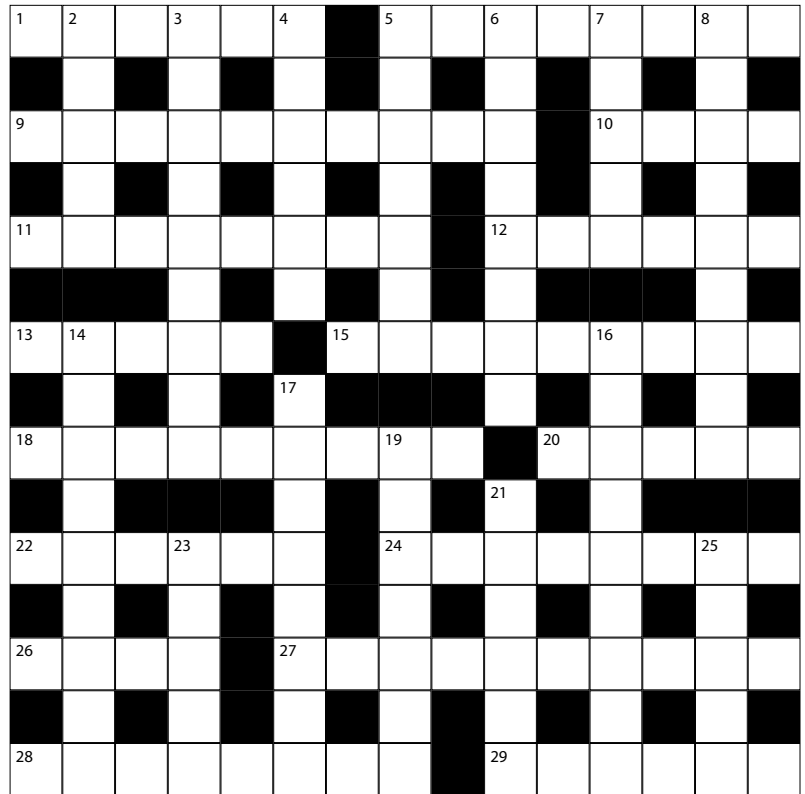
- A 1939
- B 1941
- C 1940
- D 1945

**4** The German V-1 bomb was colloquially known in the UK as?

- A The doodlebug
- B A dambuster
- C A spitfire
- D Luftwaffe

**5** Operation Barbarossa was Germany's planned invasion of which country?

- A Russia
- B United States
- C Poland
- D France



## CROSSWORD

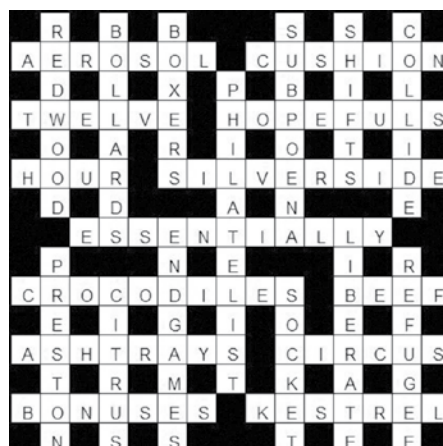
### ACROSS

- 1 Waterways (6)
- 5 Sleeps (8)
- 9 The fourth 18 service (10)
- 10 Torn – hire (4)
- 11 Squid (8)
- 12 Apart from 26, what we also do (6)
- 13 Sugary decoration for cakes etc (5)
- 15 One of the 18 services (9)
- 18 Dial 999 for one of these services (9)
- 20 Unruly (5)
- 22 Mixture of cereals, nuts and fruit (6)
- 24 Ostentatious types (8)
- 26 Our one of the 18 services (4)
- 27 Without the requisite qualification or criteria to join or take part (10)
- 28 Naked, commonly (8)
- 29 Cricket squad (6)

### DOWN

- 2 Odour, in a nice way (5)
- 3 One who does not vote (or drink?) (9)
- 4 Stop at a red one (6)
- 5 Arena for sports (7)
- 6 Offer good or service at a lower price than the competition (8)
- 7 Ornithologists study them (5)
- 8 Disclaim; disown, publicly reject (title, say) (9)
- 14 Revolutionary socialist (9)
- 16 Say sorry (9)
- 17 Substance taken to cure ill (8)
- 19 Nuts! (7)
- 21 One of the 18 services (6)
- 23 Long, thin weapon with sharp tip, meant to be thrown or thrust (5)
- 25 Not true (5)

### Last month's answers and winners



### Crossword solution August/September

### August/September quiz answers

- 1 C 40th
- 2 D Jay-Z
- 3 A Woodstock
- 4 B Reading
- 5 C Chichester

### Winner of the July quiz

Andy Macy, Nottingham

# Station Cat

## Blue light for the brigade's spin doctor

### Need for speed


 When there's a major fire, Cheshire fire and rescue service doesn't just send out firefighters. It also sends out its head of corporate communications, Mr Tim Bevington, who drives his smart saloon car, which Cheshire FRS has fitted with a flashing blue light.

The Cat rather hopes that Mr Bevington screeches to a halt and runs to the action shouting "Let me through, I'm a spin doctor," but he probably doesn't.

Mr Bevington has taken a special two-day course in blue light driving so that he can get to incidents as fast as the fire-fighters. Now, **there are some folk in Cheshire who think that, when you need to put a fire out, you can manage without your PR man**, but what do they know?

They may even suggest that there is no need to put the public at greater risk than necessary by having a PR man, even a trained one, hurtling through the streets of Cheshire. But Mr Bevington told Station Cat: "I don't go to every incident. It's for occasions when I might be required to get through in the event of major incidents. There have been a couple of incidents where I have been required to do so."

### Lucky break

 Stacey Simkins, now 86, was a firefighter during the Blitz, and his speech was the highlight of the launch of the FBU-commissioned book *Firefighters and the Blitz*. He told one of his best stories which, as he pointed out, doesn't appear in the book, and it deserves a

wider audience.


"Some idiot in the fire brigade headquarters had got a bee in his bonnet about saboteurs, so decreed there should be someone on duty outside the station all day, every day."

On 20 September 1940, it was Stacey's turn to be on duty from 10 pm to midnight. He stood outside until he felt an urgent call of nature. "I nipped back inside to the toilet, which was behind the recreation room where a fellow called Hawkins was idly bouncing one of the snooker balls off the cushions.

"I did what I had to do, and I was just picking up my hat and gas mask when we heard a short whistle. Next thing I knew, I was waking up underneath the snooker table some 20 minutes after it happened, where Hawkins and I had automatically dived. I discovered that the snooker table had moved six or eight feet up the room, and leaning against it was the hose rack which stood around 10 feet tall and 15 feet wide, in which all the hoses were stored. It had come through a wired glass partition which separated two rooms.

"The rest of the lads were rather surprised to find me there, because **the crater where the bomb had dropped was more or less in the same spot as I had been standing** a few minutes earlier."

### Out of favour

 Interesting that when the new government starts to make "a bonfire of the quangos"

JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



it starts with quangocrats who supported the old government. Local government secretary Eric Pickles has told Jenny Watson that her £14,000-a-year membership of the Audit Commission will not be renewed, apparently because, in her day job as head of the Electoral Commission, she takes the rap for some people not being able to cast their votes on election night.

The connection between this and the Audit Commission isn't obvious, but **she has a mildly left-wing background** in the Fawcett Society and the pressure group Charter 88 which called for a written constitution.




**SHOCK**  
MEDIA FOCUS ON  
CFO WHO SAYS  
PUBLIC SECTOR  
STAFF ARE  
'BONE IDLE'

Pickles is abolishing the Audit Commission in 2012, and a source at the Communities department said she had begged to stay on, "but we are not keeping someone who built their career on incompetence".

Not that the Cat is shedding tears for Ms Watson. Her £14,000 does come on top of a £100,000-a-year pay cheque for heading up the Electoral Commission.

### Bone-headed

 Merseyside chief fire officer Tony McGuirk (left) was widely reported in September for a speech to the right-wing think tank Reform, where he said that "frontline is fire engines and fire stations – not firefighters". He told other public sector bosses "we've got some bone-idle people in the public sector – there, I said it – bone-idle people". He advised them to show "muscle" and sack some people.

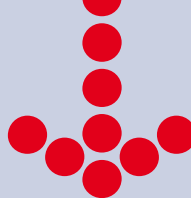
Startled by the angry response, McGuirk emailed an apology to firefighters in Merseyside. Millions of public sector workers affronted by his remarks will no doubt be relieved to hear that "in hindsight, in the discussion during the conference, **I used language which in retrospect I now regret**.

The media have focused on that element of my presentation as you would expect, and

I apologise if any staff are upset by my comments".

Some still unhappy with his self-flagellation propose he might sack himself.

# 25-year badges



**John Riley** (r), STC training department, receives his 25-year badge from Devon and Somerset brigade secretary Trevor French



**Steve Mason** (r), Northants FBU chair, receives his 25-year badge from national officer David Green



**Lee Foley** (l) Wallsend, Tyne and Wear, receives his 25-year badge from region 3 safety coordinator Russ King



Martin Gray (l), south Lincoln fire safety, receives his 25-year badge from Lincolnshire officers branch secretary John Taylor



Chris Spencer (l), HQ Gloucestershire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Mike Tully



Clive Alder (l), HQ Gloucestershire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Mike Tully



**Richard Lake** (r), HQ Gloucestershire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Mike Tully



**Stuart Bramham** (r), white watch, Chester, receives his 25-year badge from Chester branch chair Dave Doneo



**Graham Ayres** (r), Brackley, receives his 25-year badge from national officer David Green



**Richard Dean** (r) white watch Kingsway station, Derbyshire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade chair Chris Tapp



**Debbie Lock** (l) green watch control and PFCO **Helen Mason** (r) receive their 25-year badges from Mick Osborne, region 9 officers secretary and ONC rep

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### REGION 5 Greater Manchester, Lancs, Isle of Man, Cumbria, Merseyside, Cheshire

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0151 357 4400, 05rs@fbu.org.uk

### REGION 6 Derbys, Notts, Lincs, Leics, Northants

Little Dennis Street South (above Dawsons), Nottingham NG2 4EU  
0115 947 2042, 06gen@fbu.org.uk

### REGION 7 West Mids, Staffs, Warks, Hereford & Worcester, Salop

195/7 Halesowen Rd, Old Hill, West Midlands, B64 6HE  
01384 413633, 07rs@fbu.org.uk

### REGION 8 Mid and West Wales, North Wales, South Wales

4 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed, Bridgend, CF35 5LJ  
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### REGION 9 Herts, Beds, Cambs, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk

28 Atlantic Square, Station Road, Witham, Essex, CM8 2TL  
01376 521521, 09rs@fbu.org.uk

### REGION 10 London

John Horner Mews, Frome Street, Islington, London, N1 8PB  
020 7359 3638, london@fbu.org.uk

### REGION 11 Kent, Surrey, Sussex

Unit 11, Hunns Mere Way, Woodingdean, Brighton, BN2 6AH  
01273 309762, 11rs@fbu.org.uk

### REGION 12 Bucks, Berks, Hants, Oxon, Isle of Wight

FBU Regional Office, The Merlin Centre, Unit L, Gatehouse Close, Aylesbury HP19 8DP  
01296 482297, 12rs@fbu.org.uk

### REGION 13 Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, Avon, Gloucs, Wilts, Dorset

158 Muller Road, Horfield, Bristol, BS7 9RE  
0117 935 5132, 13rs@fbu.org.uk

### Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary or any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

## FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE 0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk • Please include **full details** for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.